

3-9-68
On Atomic Weapons

I am writing in connection with an important possible ambiguity in Dr. Lederberg's Feb. 17 column in *The Washington Post* on the use of tactical atomic weapons in South Vietnam.

The word "suggest" can either be interpreted to mean to advocate or to hypothesize. I trust that the operative sentence is meant to be read as follows: "If, in desperation, we hypothesized even the mildest possible policy of the use of tactical weapons in Vietnam such as: defensive use of tactical weapons within the boundaries of South Vietnam and only with the support of its recognized government, this would have disastrous predictable consequences." This distinction and certainly the point of the column seems to have been missed by the headline writer. I wish to prevent additional distortion so that we do not next read, "Nobel Laureate recommends limited use of A-Bomb in Vietnam."

A consequence that Lederberg failed to point out is that such a use of tactical weapons, or even their successful non-use as a deterrent, would foreclose any possibility of a nonproliferation treaty. Further escalation will be a more distant but no less certain future prospect.

Whatever stability there is to a nuclear stalemate certainly doesn't rest on the credibility of the prospect of our using tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam. The impact of such use on a nonproliferation treaty

already establishes quite the contrary. The stalemate argument pertains to the situation in which both adversaries have a nuclear capability. In sum, there should be a clear and immediate danger to the nation's survival and security before nuclear weapons of any kind could be considered an appropriate deterrent or reaction to non-nuclear provocation. Even Secretary of State Rusk doesn't yet make this claim for our involvement in Vietnam as a whole, let alone our position in Khesanh.

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